

# **ANCIENT FORTS**

## **OF**

### **JAMMU AND KASHMIR**



*Dr. Jasbir Singh Sarna*



(1935-2016)

*Dedicated to my Respected Uncle*

***S. Harbhajan Singh Ji***

*Retd. S.E.*

*S/o Late Bhai Sardar Singh Ji*

*Numberdar of Bhatpura, Kashmir*

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***ANCIENT FORTS OF JAMMU & KASHMIR***

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From the ancient history to the modern times, walls have been a necessity of many cities and civilizations. The word 'Fortis', derived from the latin 'fortis' means strong. In this way fort, fortress and stronghold generally signifies military defense in warfare and military bases. Large forts are known as fortresses and smaller are fortalices.

Jammu is familiarly known as the treasure house of ancient monuments. There are many forts having great historical importance. On the north, Jammu engulfed by Pir Panjal range, on the south by Punjab, Chamba towards east and Punjab and Poonch on the west. Jammu is situated on the right bank of river Tawi. Jammu's ancient name was 'Madra Janapada' (Rigvid, Mahabharat, Raj Trangni) Jamwant (Sri Guru Partap Suraj Granth). Modern Historiographer's belief confirms name from Jambu Lochan. Alphabetically we should mention these forts as:

**Akhnoor Fort :** Akhnoor is situated 28 kms from south-west of Jammu, on the right bank of Chenab river. This fort along some forts of Reasi, were built by the Sikhs to control the province of Kashmir

which then formed a part of Punjab empire which stretched from Khyber in west to Aksiachin (now a part of Chinacontrolled Kashmir) the east. According to 'Gazetter of Kashmir & Ladakh,"A brick fort is also seen on the east of the town. Its sides are 200 yards in length, walls are 3 feet thick. This fort was built ninety or one hundred years ago by Mian Tej Singh. Troops of the Central Govt. Occupied it but some of the descendants of Tej Singh live in the town is built on a terrace above the river they speak only Punjabi" The fort is situated near the Jiapota (Tree after which the Jiapota temple is named), where Maharaja Ranjit Singh performed Raj Tilak ceremony to 21 years old Raja Gulab Singh. Jiapota Ghat is revered by the Hindus. Gurdwara Tapo Asthan Sant Baba Sunder Singh of Ali Bag (Mirpur) was constructed by the Jammu Sikh Sangat. This fort is being preserved by the Govt. as a Dogra Heritage and is under renovation by Archeological Survey of India. Currently some parts of this fort are used as Revenue Office and a police station.

**Bahu Fort :** This fort is 5 kms from Jammu city, situated on a hillock on the left bank of river Tawi. It is one of the ancient forts of Jammu. It is assumed that the fort was constructed about 3,000 years ago by Raja Bahu Lochan. The renovation was done during Sikh rule by Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1820. Dogra rulers did some beautification lateron. Materials used in its construction are of sand, stones etc. Inside the fort is a religious temple dedicated to the Hindu Goddess Kali, the presiding deity of Jammu. Locally temple is familiar with the name 'Bave Wali Mata'.

Earlier the fort was also refurbished by Autar Dev in 1585. The Fort is about 1000 feet located at an elevation, opposite the old town of Jammu. The fort has eight octagonal turrets connected with thick walls. The towers have enclosures to house guards. The main entry is fit to allow passage of elephants into the fort. On the left entry into the fort is a water tank, which is 6.1x61 meters in size and a water depth of 4.6 meters. A pyramidal structure is on the right flank

used as a ammunition store. An underground chamber is used as a prison. This Chamber has a secret exist to escape from the fort in case of any emergencies. The first floor is lavishly built with arches and decorated with floral designs like a Baradari or a palace.

**Bhimgarh or Reasi Fort :** Reasi is situated on the bank of river Chenab. Reasi's ancient name was 'Resial'. Reasi is 64 kms from Jammu and 27 kms from Katra. In this region, Bhimgarh, Zorawar Singh Haveli and Salal Forts are present.

Initially, the fort was of clay but later on refurbished with stone etc. Raja Bhim Dev established Bhimgarh state during 8th century. It remained an independent principality till 1822. When Khalsa Sarkar Lahore consolidated the small states, the fort is on a hillock about 150 meters high. This fort is used by the royal families as a shelter place during the time of war. In this fort, Kanwar Naunihal Singh, grandson of Maharaja Ranjit Singh stayed for a couple of weeks. Since 1989, the fort is in the charge of Department of Archeology, J&K Govt.

The fort is got damaged several times due to its age and natural violence. This fort adds glorification to the city of Reasi.

**Zorawar Singh Haveli** is another fort of Reasi city. During the time of S. Dewan Singh in 1810 A.D. Jammu witnessed a wave of violence. Maharaja Ranjit Singh deputed his generals to curb the rebellion and Gen. Zorawar Singh Rajput was deputed as administrator of this region. Zorawar Singh was lived in fort, Haveli. Salal fort is also in region. These small forts are in poor conditions and unattended.

**Dhanidhar Fort:** Rajouri is 154 kms from Jammu. The earliest name of Rajouri was Rajapura, which figures in Mahabharat classic. The seventh century Chinese traveller also mentioned its name. (A history of India) In Reasi, there are prominent ancient forts like Dhanidhar, Mangla Devi, Darhal and Sunderbani fort.

Dhanidhar fort is 2 kms from Rajouri. Certainly it is believed that Emperor Jahangir erected this fort some 400 years ago. Dhanidhar signifies in Punjabi as highest elevation of land

portion. The Dhanidhar village is still in its close proximity. (Gazatter of Kashmir & Ladakh). In 1819, Maharaja Ranjit Singh during his Kashmir campaign attacked this fort and appointed Mirza Raheem Ullah Khan as Raja of Rajouri in place of Raja Agar Khan. Raheem remained governing Rajouri Principality upto 1846 under the Control of Khalsa Darbar Lahore. Later, Raja Gulab Singh appointed Mian Hathu Governor from 1846-1856 A.D. Mian Hathu refurbished Dhanidhar fort with stones, lime and other materials. The fort was completed in 1855 A.D. From this fort whole valley of Rajouri could be viewed. During the Dogra regime, all the revenue collected from the farmers in the shape of grains was dumped in this fort.

**Naushera or Mangla Devi Fort :**  
Naushera is 124 kms. The fort is situated 18 kms away from Naushera. This fort is very secured and difficult to access due to strong massive fortification. The fort is on the summit of a rocky hill. Ruins of a number of similar fort like structures exist on either side of the rivulet flowing



past Naushera. These ancient structures had their own rulers and each one had to depend against this neighbors. During the regims of Raja Ranjit Dev, Mian Rattan Dev had constructed the siege of fort and brought it under his possession. History says that Sardar Sahib of Gujarat and S. Mohan Singh Shaker Chakya also attacked the fort . Now-a-days this fort contains a treasury and a building, a huge damaged tank and a modern temple of

**Darhal Fort:** Located 12 kms from Naushera is a fort of Rajouri dominating the Lam and Darhal valleys. Firmly constructed on a massive rock, with steep sides, it is in acessible from all the sides. The fort is 150 yards in length and Mata Mangla Devi

20-35 yards in width. This fort was constructed by a general of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and was a stronghold of forces till 1886. Lateron, forces of Maharaja Gulab Singh occupied it. In 1947, the Muslims wanted to occupy this fort but it was quickly occupied by the local Sikhs and Hindus under the leader-

ship of Subedar Ranjit Singh. In October 1947 Pakistan forces launched many attacks to capture the fort but they were firmly repulsed by the staunch resistance under the command of Subedar Ranjit Singh. Lateron, Ranjit Singh achieved martyrdom in one of the skirmishes.

**Chingus Fort :** The fort is situated on the Mughal road near to Noori-Chamb. According to 'Gazatter of Kashmir and Ladakh' it is the same place where emperior Jahangir died and Noor-Jahan (Wife) got his entrails interred. His dead body, less entrails was taken to Lahore without it being disclosed that he was dead." The Mughal entourage while passing from Rajouri to Srinagar halted at convenient places. Enroute are a number of mini forts and inns. The two important places associated with them are Chingus and Noori-Chamb. The fort is in a dislapidated condition.

**Jasrota Fort:** This fort is also known as Billawar fort. Billawar is 80 kms from Jammu and 25 kms from Kathua. Billawar was earlier known as 'Walapurt' (Rajtarangni). Billawar (Balaur) was founded by Raja Bhopat Pal (1598-1614) Billawar town is situated on the bank of Naaz and Bhinni Nallahs. (Encyclopaedia of Tourism Resource in India. The kingdom of Jasrota was founded by Raja

Jasdev of Jammu in 1019 A.D. According to one source, they are Subclan Rajputs, who migrated from Rajasthan at the time of Emperor Aurangzeb. The fort of Jasrota was erected by the kings of Jasrota. Originally the fort had seven gates but only four gates mark their existence. The fort is stretched along 700 kanals of land. The fort houses different palaces, ponds, ancient temples etc. According to the author of 'The Punjab Hill States "Owing to the fertility of the track being so close to the plains, the Kingdom of Jasrota under, its native rulers was once a powerful state which equated in importance with Jammu down to the time of its extinction in 1834." There are a few forts namely Lakhanpur Fort, Ramkot fort, Chanchla Mata Fort, Basoli Fort, Jandi Fort Hiranagar and Mehtab Garh Fort, Lakhanpur. These forts due to frequent raids and ravages, now standing in adiplapidated conditions.

**Samba Fort :** Samba is 40 kms from Jammu city. These forts according to one source were erected during 13 -14th century. Samba town was named after the Sumb and Raja Maldev, representing Sumb deity. This ancient fort was

build by Raja of Mandi, Naga Raja Goursen (1679-1684). In 1808-12 Maharaja Ranjit Singh conquered Jasrota and brought Samba under Sikh rule and deputed Raja Suchit Singh as its ruler. The Samba fort was built by Maharaj Ranjit Singh in 1822 on the remains of old fort. Some work was carried by Raja Suchit Singh in 1830 A.D. There are three forts in Samba namely Mohargarh Fort, Dhiirgarh Fort and Bebenegarh Fort. This fort is seven kms away on Dhar Road from national highway. These fort on a plateau covered by lushgreen fields, fourth fort namely Malkot is in ruins. In these forts, there was a govt. school functioning, where reputed Gulzari Lal Nanda and S.L. Sehgal continued their studies. The gates of Mohargarh fort are still intact against the earlier raids. Red sand, stones etc are utilized in its construction. The walls of these forts are two kms in length and 2-4 meters in breadth.

Now-a-days noticeable number of families (about 140) of Gujjars, Rajputs, Thakurs etc. reside in them. The face architect of these forts are an amalgam of Kashmir is popularly known as the heaven on earth. Hindu-Muslim-Sikhs architecture. A large water reservoir is the main source of water for the residing families. The Samba fort is declared an ancient monument under the Ancient monument preservation Act 1920. The Govt underlook conservation and restoration work in March, 2010. Inspite of above mentioned forts, there are many more forts like Krimchi fort, Jagnoo fort, Badhigarh fort Bajalta (Udhampur), Poonch fort etc. These forts are in dilapidated condition but sincere efforts should be made at the earliest for their preservation. Kashmir is popularly known as the heaven on earth. There are some heritage glorification sites including the forts of Kashmir & Ladakh.

## **Hariparbat Fort :**

The magnificent fort of Hari Parbat is three miles from the Srinagar city. This fort was built by the great Akbar during his 3rd tour to Kashmir in 1597. Present part along with complex galleries were constructed during the 18th century. According to Moorcraft, 'at the same end, the eastern extremity of the city, is situated the hill called the Hariparbat at the southern foot of which is the Lake or Dal. The Kohi-maran is surmounted by a long narrow fort, beneath the bastions of which on the edge of the rock, two or three large guns are mounted, which command the city. It may be doubted if the fortress itself could be furnished with canon, as it is entirely roofed over, and presents no appearance of embrasures. The slope of the hill is covered with houses. (Travels, P:338). When Baran Charles Hugel traveller visited the fort he writes, "At a miles' distance, we passed the Hime Parvat mountain, which terminates the semi circle round the lake

on the west. We passed through dirty streets, interminable bazars, and over two canals, to the fort on the Hamirparvat. At the foot of Hamirparvat the great Akbar built another city, which is named Nagar Nagar and enclosed it with strong walls and towers. Blocks of stone and large Coloums, brought from the more ancient temples of Kashmir lie in desolate grandeur around. ".....The fort on the Hamirparvat called Kimaran is garrisoned by Sikh troops, but as we drew near it we were challanged by the guard and ordered not to proceed any further, no to attempt to ascend the heights. It is built on the perpendicular rock and commands the entire city: It might be readered unassailable but for the total want of water on the mountain. The fortress was built under the Pathans by the Governor Ali Mohmmad Khan, when he renounced the authority of Kabul. The Kashmirians and Sikhs presume or great deal on this fort, and even in its present state, it would be a

most arduous undertaking to assail it, as the position of the valley ought to preclude the possibility of advance to artillery. (Travels, 1844 (Reprint 1970) P. 113-120)

There are many mythological stories linked with this fort. It is also known as the 52 pithas (Sarikadevi Temple) of Hindus. Some linked it with a heritage of Rishi Kasyapa from whom name of Kasya Papura, or Kashmir derived. Hariparbat fort was also used as a 'royal prisoner' Shah Mahmud, Fateh Khan Shah Shuja detained in the Hariparbat Fort in 1811, is well known to history scholars. (The pathans-olaf caore, P:288) According to RK Parmu, "The military control of these forts vested in the Thanadars or Commandants who were invariably Sikhs. Sometimes Khattris and Brahmins possessing soldierly qualities and discipline also performed these duties. The fortified stations such as Hirapore, Bahramgalla,



Ganderbal, Drava Sharda Baramulla, Uri, Hattian, Chinari and Muzaffarabad, were strategically most important (A History of Sikh Rule in Kashmir, P:282)

### **Shergarhi Fort :**

The Shergarhi fort is situated near the bridge of Amira Kadal Srinagar. The fort was originally laid out by the Afghan Governor Amir Khan Jawansher (1770-76), on the site previously called Darabagh. According to BC Hugel, "I have omitted a few words on Shaherghur, which derives its name, accordingly to the best authorities, not from Shaher city or Shir Lion, but from the Shiah, the Persian sect of Mohammadans. The Palace was built by Amir Khan Jehan and was called Nursing-Ghur by the Sikhs." (Travels in Kashmir and the Punjab, (P:120). The Shergarhi fort serves the double purpose of a fort and a palace. "Originally, it was rectangular in shape about 400 yards long and 200 yards wide. It was built of stones and mortar. Its walls were about

22 feet high, supported at intervals by strong bastions as we find in the rampart around the Hari Parbat Fort. The interior consisted of dwelling houses, Government offices and barracks for soldiers. The southern, western and north western sides more protected by a ditch 30 feet wide. The northern side was bounded by the extant Kut-Kol canal, and the eastern side by the Jehlum river and its stout embankment." (Kashmir Handbook Mr. Ince, P:144)

The fort area was garrisoned by the Punjabi and Rhilla Soldiery who resided in the contonment. During Sikh rule, at Shahid Ganj, in the neighbourhood of the Shergarh fort, a new habitation to accommodate the Akalis was established. Here they lived, prayed and were eveready for military service. Dewan Moti Ram, Sikh Governor renovated this fort. Lateron Col. Mian Singh Sikh Governor built Basant Bagh opposite the fort. Hari Singh Nalwa, the Sikh governor built a summer house with

a white cupola on the banks of the river Jhelum between Shankaracharya Hillock and the Shergarh fort on a site lying between the extant Sri Partap College and the Nedous Hotel, Srinagar.' (A History of Sikh Rule, P. 312). When the Sikhs captured this fort in 1819, Dewan Chand and other Sikh Governors used it as residence. Col. Mian Singh constructed a beautiful Diwani-i-Aam hall, one big bazar, barracks, Rang Mahal, Gole House etc.

#### **Zorawar Fort, Ladakh:**

Zorawar Singh (1786-1841) Rajput was a military general of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who conquered Ladakh and Baltistan in the Sikh times and carried the Khalsa flag as far as the interior of Tibet. About Zorawar Singh's place of birth authorities differ. He was a native of Kussal, Reasi (Major GC Symth); Kahlur, Bilaspur (Hutchison & Vogel), Ansora, Kangra (Narsing Das Nargis). Zorawar Singh had to make two more incursions before Ladakh was annexed to the Sikh Kingdom in 1840. The same

year, Zorawar Singh attacked Baltistan. Zorawar Singh next turned his attention towards Western Tibet. According to the 'Umdat-ut-Twarikh,' this was the suggestion he proffered to Maharaja Ranjit Singh, when he in March 1836 waited on him at the village of Jandiala Sher Khan to pay nazarana. He told the Maharaja that he was ready to 'Kindle the fires of fightings and by the grace of ever triumphant glory of the Maharaja, he would take possession (Tibet) of it. "The Maharaja, however, was not willing to allow him to undertake the adventure. Zorawar Singh had his chance in the time of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's successor, Maharaja Sher Singh. (The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism, Vol IV P:462) In 1841, he once again planned and attempted an invasion of Tibet through Ladakh. Unable to face the winter, the Dogra army could not fight well and were defeated. The Great Zorawar Singh General was finally killed near taklakot on 21 December 1841.

The Zorawar fort was built by the General in April 1836, with the help of local material like clay, Sun dried bricks, stone, wood etc. The fort is spread on area of 27.17 acres of land. Inside the fort is a natural spring, a temple and a mosque was built by Zorawar Singh himself. The fort is surrounded by a moat 3-5 metres in depth. A small wooden bridge is situated near the entrance. A well demarcated stable is on the left made up of mud bricks. The aim of providing a base to sustains the troops in Ladakh is the main motto of General Zorawar Singh. The fort was occupied by 300 soldiers, 30 artillery men under the command of Dalel Singh, (Jammu & Kashmir Territories). The fort is surrounded by approximately 15 feet high boundary of Sun dried mud bricks wall. In the centre of the fort is a army parade ground.

**Basgo Fort, Ladakh :** Basgo is a historical town situated on bank of Indus river in Ladakh. Basgo fort was built in the 15th century. There is an existing heritage

monastery as well as a collection of stupas and diapidated fort ruins. Basgo is situated about 40 Kms west of Leh along the Srinagar way. It is known for its castle ruins and the adjoining royal temples spectacularly located on the rocks. The complex of buildings includes a ruined fortress dating from 15th century. Below the forts and temples are the small pretty villages. There is also a semo Fort, a short distant away from the Basgo.

Kashmir is a priceless treasure house of heritage cum archological monuments. It is the duty of all to restore the pristine glory of these century old monuments and heritage sites. These forts are assets of glorification and precious heritage of our state. These living monuments are the grand examples of the legacy of the art and must be preserved for the coming generations to peep into their rich past and glorious heritage.

*(Published in Dally Excelsior, The Kashmir Times,  
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